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PROCEEDINGS
OF
THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY.

1838. No. 9.

January 22.

SIR Wm. R. HAMILTON, A.M., President, in the Chair.

A Letter from Colonel Yorke was read, enclosing a copy of Lord John Russell's letter to the Lord Lieutenant, informing his Excellency that the Academy's address to the Queen was very graciously received, and that her Majesty has been pleased to consent to become the Patroness of the Academy.

Sir William Betham read a paper on the "Eugubian Inscriptions" preserved at Gubbio, an Episcopal city in the Papal states, on seven plates of bronze, which were discovered on excavating the crypt of an ancient temple there in the year 1444. Five of the inscriptions are in the old Etruscan character, written from right to left, like the Hebrew and other Shemitic languages; two, the sixth and seventh, are in what is now called the Roman character, written from left to right. Two other plates were found at the same time, and were sent to Venice in the year 1505, but never returned.

The object of Sir William Betham's paper was to show that the ancient Etruscan language was identical with the Iberno-Celtic, and, that the Irish language, as it is still spoken in this country, affords the true clue to the interpretation of these inscriptions, which have baffled the efforts of so many learned men.

The author read to the Academy his translation of the sixth and seventh tables, (those written in the Roman character), which he selected as containing matter of great interest to the inhabitants of these countries, being a record of the discovery of the use of the magnetic needle in navigation, and of the British Islands, by the ancient Etruscans.

The following is an abstract of the facts recorded in these very ancient documents, according to Sir William Betham's translation of them:

The sixth table commences with an invitation to the people, to go "*to divide and farm the western lands*," and to proceed to the west, "*where are three islands*" of rich and productive soil, with cattle and sheep in abundance, and *large black deer*, productive of mines, with fine streams and every advantage for residence. It then proceeds to state, that the ships which were fitted out to convey settlers had been provided with stored food and abundant provisions for the voyage, with good water *in skins* to be served out daily; that the skill and seamanship of the commanders and the men guaranteed their safety; and that the people might venture to go, with the most perfect confidence, over the '*for ages untracked wilderness of the sea.*' Then is depicted the wretched system of coasting navigation, which confined the trader to the shores, amidst shoals, rocks, surfs, and other imminent dangers, all which had been overcome and avoided by the discovery of the *little pointer*, (the PIAC LU), by which they were enabled to cross from coast to coast in '*the same certain and established track;*' and the high seas, which the mariner formerly contemplated with the greatest apprehension when out of sight of land, might be crossed with certainty, avoiding all dangers in deep water. "*It was become trade's plain, a noble space, an easy space, a shortened space, tracked space, man's own space, the means of trade's* *progress, man's treasury, the source of the increase of man's wealth. Navigation by stored food and the* LITTLE POINTER *was made safe and pleasant.*"

This passage occurs several times in the inscription. The *little pointer* and *the stored food* are described as the means by which the three western islands had been discovered.

The events of former voyages are described very emphatically: on one occasion, it appears, the ships had gone so far north that the water skins had been frozen and burst, and they fell in with what they supposed to be land, but found, on examination, to their great consternation it was only ice.

They proceeded with cautious anxiety by means of the sun by day and *the seven* (ꞅeacȯ ꞃe, *ursa major*) by night; and at length saw the land of the three islands; on *the first* of which they saw sheep.

The concluding passage of the seventh table reminds the *Phœnicians,* (for although these people were certainly *resident in Italy,* they are throughout called PUNI), that the island country which had been discovered would form a noble country for trade, protected from hostile aggression by the sea; and might hereafter become an asylum (in case their own country should be invaded and conquered by an enemy of *robbing people*) to which they might retire in their ships, and where their friends and colonists would receive them with joy and gratitude in return for the benefits they had conferred upon them.

In the last paragraph we are informed that the inscription was written *after three hundred years from the great subterraneous noise and commotion, or the earthquake.*

Of the former unsuccessful attempts to decipher these very interesting inscriptions, Sir William Betham referred to that of Father Gori, published with a *fac simile,* and that of Lanzi, in his *Saggio di Lingua Etrusca,* both of which, he stated, were unsatisfactory, far-fetched, and absurd.

Mr. Samuel Ferguson read the first part of a paper "on the Antiquity of the *Kiliee,* or *Boomerang,*" the object of which was to show, that the peculiar characteristics of that instrument belonged to the *cateia* and *aclys* of the Latin classic writers, the latter being, most probably, identical with the *ancyle* of the Greeks.

The chief proofs in the case of the *cateia* turned, 1st, on the epithet *panda* applied to it by Silius Italicus, (Punic. l. iii. v. 278,) and, 2nd, on the description of it given by Isidore, a writer of the end of the sixth and beginning of the seventh century, who states concerning it, "*Si ab artifice mittatur rursùm redit ad eum qui misit.*" (Origin. l. xviii. c. 7.)

The chief proofs in the case of the *aclys,* rested, 1st, on the identification of the *aclys* and *cateia,* by Servius (in Æneid. l. vii. v. 730, 741); 2nd, on an inference of its semilunar shape, drawn from Valerius Flaccus, (Argonaut. l. vi. v. 99); and 3rd, on the statement of Sidonius Appollinaris, a writer of the fifth century, who, referring, as it would appear, to these weapons, describes them as missiles, "quæ feriant *bis* missa *semel.*" (Carm. V. v. 402.)

The identity of the *aclys* and *ancyle* was inferred from their apparent etymological relation, and from the statement of the Scholiast on Euripides—*αγκυλαι τα ακοντια, απο του επηγκυλιασθαι,* (Euripid. Orest. v. 1479).

An investigation of the radical meanings of these names confirmed the testimonies adduced, by showing that each was properly descriptive of a curved instrument.

The statement of Isidore, that the *cateia* and club of Hercules were the same, was, in like manner, confirmed by an investigation of the radical meaning of the word *clava,* and by the exhibition of drawings of curved *clavæ* (almost identical in form with a variety of the Australian instrument) taken from the antique, one of which appeared to have been intended to represent the Herculean weapon. A further confirmation was drawn from the fact, that instruments, formed on the model of these, were found to exhibit the peculiar flight of the boomerang. So also of the club or hammer of Thor, the Hercules of Scandinavian mythology, stated in the Edda to have possessed similar properties; instruments of a +, and hammer shape, being also found to exhibit all the peculiarities of the Australian weapon. Hence, an illustration of the crosses on Pagan British coins, and of the tradition of cruciform missiles still preserved in Irish romances.

The connexion between the curved club and the boomerang being thus established, it was suggested, that some relationship might be looked for between the Germanic nations, who still call their club *keile* and *kiele,* a name properly descriptive of a crooked weapon, and the Australian tribes who call the cognate instrument *kiliee.*

From the remarkable fact, that the names of the straight spear in several of the languages of Europe are either identical, or radically connected, with these characteristic names of the crooked missile, it was argued that the boomerang is a more ancient weapon than the spear.

DONATIONS.

Astronomical Observations made at the Observatory of Cambridge. By the Rev. James Challis, M. A. Vol. IX., for the year 1836. Presented by the Author.

Address of His Royal Highness the Duke of Sussex, K. G., &c. &c. &c., the President, read at the Anniversary Meeting of the Royal Society on Thursday, November 30*th,* 1837. Presented by the Society.

Guilielmi Gilberti, de Magnete, Magneticisque Corporibus, et de Magno Magnete Tellure; Physiologia nova, plu-

rimis et argumentis, et Experimentis demonstrata. Fol. Lond. 1600. Presented by Aquilla Smith, M. D.

Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles. Tom. X. Presented by the Royal Academy of Brussels.

Mémoires Couronnés par l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles. Tom. XI. Presented by the same.

Bulletin de l'Academie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles, 1837. Nos. 1 to 9. Presented by the same.

Programme des Questions proposées pour le Concours de 1838, *par l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Bruxelles.* 3 copies. Presented by the same.

Annales de l'Observatoire de Bruxelles, publieés aux frais de l'Etat. Par le directeur, A. Quetelet. Tom. I. Deuxième Partie. Presented by the Author.

Comptes Rendus Hebdomadaires des Séances de l'Académie des Sciences. Par MM. les Secretaires Perpetuels. Deuxieme Semestre, 1837. Nos. 1 to 26. Presented by the Academy.

February 12.

SIR Wm. R. HAMILTON, A. M., President, in the Chair.

The following gentlemen were elected Members of the Academy:

John Anster, LL. D., Joseph Carson, Esq., F. T. C., Mountiford Longfield, LL. D., Robert Caldwell, Esq., Alexander Boyle, Esq., Thomas Drummond, Esq., John Hamilton, Esq., Rev. George Vernon, Rev. Robert Knox, James Whiteside, Esq.